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ABSTRACT

A project was undertaken to develop an inservice staff development program for vocational teachers working with disadvantaged students in local school districts in Pennsylvania. The focus of the inservice activity was on the improvement of instructional approaches such as individualized instruction, teaching and reteaching, small group discussions, illustrated instruction, and curriculum modification. Members of the project instructional resource team visited local vocational and technical schools for 10-week periods. After completing their observations, the team members decided upon eight general services that seemed most needed by the vocational teachers. Members of the instructional resource team then proceeded to work with 42 teachers who were serving over 280 disadvantaged students in six vocational schools. Generally speaking, the services provided by the instructional resource team were directed toward capacity building. Individual team members spent their time working directly with teachers to help them develop instructional strategies and approaches that would improve the quality of their teaching. The summative evaluations written by the teachers, administrators, and advisory committee members participating in the project indicated that it was quite successful, with 99 percent of the teachers indicating that they found the resource team to be of help to them in their vocational classes. (MN)

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An Inservice Staff Development Program for Vocational Teachers Working with Disadvantaged Students

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Competencies for vocational teachers preparing to teach disadvantaged students have become a national concern of teacher educators (Tuckman & O'Brien, 1969). As a result of federal legislation and an ongoing need, inservice education for teachers of the disadvantaged remains an educational priority. The Personnel Training Section of the Education Amendments of 1976 (PL 94-482) included special needs learners as a priority for preservice and inservice training programs. According to this law, the purpose of vocational education personnel preparations is "to improve the state's vocational education programs by improving the qualifications of persons serving or preparing to serve in vocational education programs," (Federal Register, 1977, p53850). The regulations provided that the funds available for this purpose could be used for training that was designed to improve the quality of instruction, guidance, supervision, and administration of programs for persons working with special needs students.

The greatest impediment to the delivery of inservice teacher education is its history. According to Rubin (1978) teachers have a poor attitude toward inservice education because of negative past experiences. They come into the sessions expecting more of the same . . . inservice that is not designed for their needs and ideas that are theoretical, untried in classroom settings and impractical. The type of inservice most prevalent is the type teachers consider least helpful: the fragmented one-shot meeting with little continuity and low level of involvement by teachers. Skrtic, Clark, and Bolland (1980) believe very little coordination exists between universities and the public schools in the planning and delivery of inservice programs. They further state that "to be successful, inservice programs must be a collaborative effort that recognizes

and utilizes the strengths of local education agencies, state education agencies, institutions of higher education, and professional organizations" (p. 149). According to Faucette (1975), inservice workshops for teachers of the disadvantaged should be well planned in advance, intensive in nature, and should be well coordinated with university personnel whenever possible. The coordination between personnel at the university and secondary level is of utmost importance if the necessary programs are to filter down to the classroom level.

Ryor (1979) believes inservice education has been in ill health for a long time. A major reason for this malady is that teachers who know most about their own needs have had little to say about it. Too seldom has inservice education been directed at improving school programs and when it has, it is decreed by state mandate, administrator edict, or curriculum developers. What we need is a cooperative process of school improvement in which teachers are full partners in decision-making. This collaboration, according to Weaver (1979), is not merely cooperation or a matter of good will, but an agreed-upon distribution of power, status, and authority. Local districts, school boards, community groups, teachers, administrators, state department officers, and college faculty, all have vested interest in the control of the educative process. The nature of shared governance relationships will vary in kind and in difficulty according to the degree to which vested interests conflict or coincide. Negotiation of vested interests and conflicting needs is central to effective collaboration. Unless all parties decide to reach agreement on strategy and substance, inservice education will not get much budgetary attention in this period of fiscal conservatism (Shanker, 1979).

It would be misleading to imply that all inservice education programs have been totally ineffective. Many successful practices do exist. These programs have done much to alleviate the problems of educators who are working

with special needs students. For example, the Baltimore City Public Schools' inservice training program for teachers of disadvantaged students is an excellent example (Gardener, 1974). This statement is based on the fundamental criteria set forth by Friedman, Brinke, and Hayes (1980) which states that strong inservice programs must include provisions for enabling teachers to keep abreast of research that has implications for the improvement of instruction. Teachers should not only learn about significant findings, but also they should learn how to apply them in their classrooms. The Baltimore program consisted of a series of intensive workshops conducted in three week intervals, five hours a day, five days a week during the summer. Eight primary modules were developed for teachers and delivered by a staff of teacher-educators, they were:

1. Becoming sensitive to problems of disadvantaged students;
2. Recognizing more than one value system for behavior;
3. Studying applications of innovative educational techniques;
4. Using effective instructional methods for slow learners;
5. Following procedures to minimize causes of discipline problems;
6. Developing instruction units to assist vocational school students;
7. Generating cooperation for a greater relationship between shop and academic studies; and
8. Writing program objectives behaviorally.

Another inservice program was conducted by Farmer (1980). His program consisted of eight, one-week regional staff seminars in the state of North Carolina to assist teachers and counselors working with the disadvantaged. A total of 256 teachers and counselors participated in the program. A pre/post program survey revealed that participants improved their skills in working

with disadvantaged students, and became more sensitive to the needs of these students. The participants recommended that more teacher-educators and administrators be involved in future staff-development workshops of this nature. Many teachers revealed in the post survey that prior to the seminar, their knowledge of teaching the disadvantaged was limited, and they did not actually know how a student qualified as being disadvantaged. With findings such as these, it is critical that the "gap" between practices and knowledge at the university and secondary levels concerning the education of disadvantaged learners be closed.

A Pennsylvania study by Thornton (Note 1) dealing with the inservice staff development needs of vocational educators yielded the following results:

1. Teachers desired more assistance in the development of classroom modules;
2. They wanted more indepth discussion on the development of math and reading skills of special needs students;
3. They requested use of small group format for inservice training.

A systematic approach to inservice teacher training had been developed by Phelps (1975). His approach consists of seven modules designed to acquaint occupational and special educators with a process of providing cooperative instructional arrangements for special needs learners. Each of the modules contained inservice activities that related to students' individualized education programs. A self-directed needs assessment was included so that teachers could select modules or activities that were appropriate to their needs.

Another example of an inservice program that was helpful to special needs teachers utilized a series of modules developed by Ehresman, Hanch, and Robertson (1976). Their program entailed six inservice sessions that categorize

specific procedures and materials for use by teachers of disadvantaged learners. Each handbook contained informational notes, directions, and resource information for each of the six sessions. The units were designed so that, with minor procedural modifications, they could be studied and completed either during a scheduled inservice meeting or individually as a self-paced package.

Winkler (1980) developed a handbook that was a resource for teachers, counselors, administrators, and other support staff as well as an inservice teacher training manual. Each of the first three (of four) sections contained two components. The first was a resource component with informative materials and various exercises to help teachers understand and meet the needs of mainstreamed special needs learners. The second component was a set of instructions for activities for a trainer to use in inservice workshops.

The Illinois State Department of Education (1981) developed a list of guidelines concerning staff development at the local level for teachers working with disadvantaged students. These guidelines reiterate the importance of cooperation between the universities and public schools in the development of inservice training programs.

These programs or approaches are but a few of the many alternative practices currently being used. But, widespread usage of systematic, cooperative personnel development programs is uncommon. Batsche (1980) suggested that comprehensive inservice education activities and university preparation programs be expanded to better prepare teachers to work with special needs students. With local input in the development of inservice programs, vocational teachers should be more receptive to inservice activities.

The Approach

As effective as these early preservice and inservice activities were, there was still a concern for the delivery of services to teachers of

disadvantaged students at the local level. In Pennsylvania, input garnered from teachers, counselors, and administrators revealed that vocational instructors needed additional help to effectively teach disadvantaged learners within regular vocational programs. Specifically, many local personnel were concerned that vocational teachers were having difficulties in making adaptations to curriculum and instructional approaches despite the fact that many have participated in earlier inservice activities. As an outgrowth of these concerns, a new inservice delivery model was developed by The Pennsylvania State University and implemented through a grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Education, Bureau of Vocational Education, for teachers of academically and/or economically disadvantaged youth (as defined in the Education Amendments of 1976, P.L. 94-482). The primary objective of the inservice project was:

> To select and train an instructional resource team for the delivery of inservice and preservice training needs of teachers of disadvantaged learners.

In order to accomplish this objective, a ten-member advisory committee was formed. The advisory committee consisted of administrators and teachers from area vocational-technical schools, state staff personnel from the Bureau of Vocational Education, teacher educators, curriculum specialists, and co-op coordinators. The first meeting of the advisory committee was designed to obtain input as to techniques to identify potential schools for participation, and to formulate and discuss the types of services to be provided by the instructional resource team as well as logistics requirements. Seventeen (17) suggestions were provided and discussed by the advisory committee for the instructional resource team to consider when working with regular vocational teachers.

The focus of this inservice activity was on two areas. The first area of emphasis was the improvement of instructional approaches such as individualized instruction, teach-reteach, small group and illustrated instruction. The second field of concentration was curriculum modification. Specifically, emphasis was placed on establishing multiple level instructional objectives which would enable disadvantaged learners to compete successfully with non-disadvantaged learners. Included as part of the curriculum modification process was the identification and assessment of reading levels and reading characteristics of selected students. Once the readability levels of textbooks and handout materials were determined, passages were rewritten or subdivided into smaller segments for learners with specific reading difficulties. When available, the assistance of in-school reading specialists was incorporated into the curriculum modification process.

The instructional resource team consisted of members whose background experiences included vocational teaching, co-op education, or special education. Each member of the team was enrolled in the graduate teacher education program and had varying degrees of experience in working with academically and/or economically disadvantaged youth. Before being assigned a local school, training sessions were conducted for the team members to serve as an introduction. Resource persons whose expertise consisted of identification and assessment, curriculum development, reading diagnosis and instructional strategies for disadvantaged and handicapped learners were utilized for training the resource team members.

Four of the instructional resource team members were assigned one area vocational-technical school each, for a ten-week period of time. Each team member was to visit the school one day per week, for approximately a seven-hour

period of time. One member of the instructional resource team served as the coordinator and was responsible for scheduling and directing support services when necessary.

Each team member was requested to maintain a daily log of dates, types of services rendered and general comments from each teacher. Following each weekly visitation, the project coordinator was responsible for securing reference materials, films, instructional aids, or other resources to support the instructional team and meet the specific need requests of the vocational teachers.

Although the needs of the vocational teachers varied from teacher to teacher, there were eight general services which seemed to be necessary for most of the instructors. They were:

1. identification of disadvantaged students and suggested services needed to meet each individual need;
2. development of lesson plans and learning activities;
3. modification of existing curricula to accommodate the unique needs of a variety of students;
4. identification of resources to supplement instructional delivery;
5. diagnosis of reading materials and individual student reading competencies;
6. development of new instructional materials and aids;
7. development of competency-based instructional materials;
8. grading and performance evaluation alternatives.

Generally speaking, the services provided by the instructional resource team were directed toward capacity building, i.e. activities which were designed to improve the teacher's capacity to serve disadvantaged students over a long period of time as opposed to those activities which were short-term solutions but did not have a long-range impact on vocational teachers. In some

instances, the instructional team was requested to work with individual students. This activity was discouraged in order that the resource team might better spend its time working directly with the teacher so that the skills and competencies for working with disadvantaged students might be developed. Therefore, the resource team emphasized that their role was not to serve as tutors or as teacher aids, but to help teachers develop instructional strategies and approaches which would improve the quality of their teaching.

Selection of Schools and Teachers

A letter and a project abstract was sent to the 21 area vocational-technical schools within the center region of Pennsylvania served by The Pennsylvania State University. The letter described the purposes of the project and nature of services that would be provided by the instructional resource team. Responses were received form 16 of the 21 schools contacted. At the suggestion of the advisory comittee, and based on each individual school's needs and number of teachers willing to work with the instructional resource team, six (6) schools were ultimately selected.

It was the decision of the project's advisory committee to serve those schools which exhibited the greatest need in terms of the number of disadvantaged learners or those schools which by the nature of their geographic location were not often served by the traditional in-service approaches of university courses or workshops. Only one school fit this classification. (Those schools which were not selected the first year were served the second year or will be serviced during the third year of the project.)

Following the final selection of the five schools, team members met with the contact person in each school and discussed the methods used in their selection. The contact person was asked to finalize their list of teachers

and establish a working schedule for each. In one instance, the instructional resource team member was asked to interview each member of the faculty to determine the specific details as to the types of services each needed. Participation was on a voluntary basis, with initial identification made by the vocational director or representative. As was expected,those teachers whose names were "volunteered" by their director were willing to work with the team members. Individual teachers were generally selected by their administrator because they had the greatest number of disadvantaged learners in their respective classes. Of course disadvantaged students were those identified in the state plan in accordance with P.L. 94-482. Since all teachers held a Vocational I certificate, university credit for participation was optional. Once the field resource team began working in each school, additional teachers sought assistance as needs arose.

Feedback and Evaluation

Upon the recommendation of the advisory committee, three methods of evaluation were used to solicit input from the instructional resource participants or administrators. The first method was a summative evaluation written or given by every participating teacher and administrator. The second was a summative evaluation provided by the advisory committee and the third method was an evaluation conducted by an independent third party consultant.

The advisory committee felt that a summative evaluation would be superior to a survey or questionnaire instrument. Since the sample size was small (N=42), it would not be difficult to solicit these types of responses. A check sheet was provided for each participant to clarify the specific types of services rendered by the instructional resource team. Mail responses were obtained from teachers who were unavailable to participate in the final

advisory committee meeting. The returned evaluations included items concerning the number of disadvantaged students served, nature of services provided and suggestions for improvement. In all, 42 teachers worked with the instructional resource team and impacted on an estimated 280 disadvantaged students. It was evident from the summative evaluation that the vast majority (over 90%) of the teachers felt that they now had the potential to continue to successfully modify and provide instructional experiences to help disadvantaged learners who were enrolled in their classes. A total of 99% of the respondents reported that the instructional resource team provided a helpful service. Only one response indicated the service was not helpful and that respondent indicated that he was unable to use the services effectively because of his own scheduling constraints. This respondent did report that he felt there could be much benefit derived from the types of services provided by the instructional resource team approach. Further analysis of the findings indicated that most of the teachers (97%) used the instructional resource member for three or more types of services. Those services used most frequently were:

1. Assistance in finding teaching materials (66%)
2. Help in determining reading levels of textbooks and other materials (62%)
3. Assistance with the resolve of identifying reading problems (57%)
4. Assistance in identifying specific learning problems (57%)
5. Assistance with computation and measurement [math problems] (43%)
6. Assistance in developing alternative teaching techniques (43%)
7. Assistance in revising unit plans and lessons (38%)
8. Resource person for films and other printed media (33%)

The advisory committee evaluation was based upon a review of the daily log sheets submitted by each resource team member. These sheets specified

the services requested by the teachers and how the resource team member responded to each request. The summative teacher reports and letters of evaluation provided by participating school administrators were also used by the advisory committee in formulating their final evaluation of the project.The objectives of the project were matched with these project outcomes to determine degree of accomplishment.

Finally, an independent third party consultant conducted a review of the project's activities. This evaluation also included a review of the activities of the participating teachers and the advisory committee. The third party evaluator felt that the instructional resource team approach had the potential to make a significant impact on the delivery of vocational education for disadvantaged students, and that the evaluation results indicated that there was a need for teacher eduation institutions to continue their field-based inservice activities. This need was particularly evident in the area of service provision to disadvantaged students.

In an effort to provide future direction, it was recommended by the advisory committee that the resource team spend more time with each of the vocational teachers within the repective schools. It was suggested that the time be increased from once a week, for a period of up to one-half of the school year. The second major concern was that the teachers expressed a strong need for tutoring types of services, which could be provided directly to the disadvantaged student and coordinated with the ongoing vocational instruction.

Summary

As a result of federal legislation in the 1970's, increased emphasis has been placed on mainstreaming disadvantaged learners into vocational education programs. This mainstreaming has also created new concerns for

teachers. Many teachers believe they lack the specialized training that is essential when working with mainstreamed disadvantaged students. In response to teachers' concerns, many states and local school systems have recognized the need for staff development programs for teachers working with disadvantaged students.

One staff development program was developed and implemented by the Division of Occupational and Vocational Studies at The Pennsylvania State University. The delivery of this program was accomplished by means of an instructional resource team which worked with vocational teachers in their own classrooms. In all, forty-two (42) teachers in six (6) vocational schools worked with the resource team. Combined, these teachers had over 280 disadvantaged students enrolled in their programs.

As a result of the summative evaluations written by the teachers, comments from administrators and advisory committee members indicated that the project was extremely successful. In fact, 99 percent of the teachers responded that they found the resource team helpful to them in their vocational classes. Over ninety (90) percent indicated that they now had the skills to continue to modify their curriculum and instructional strategies in order to better serve disadvantaged students. It is hoped that through coordinated inservice efforts, such as the one described, vocational teachers will better be able to positively impact on disadvantaged learners in vocational education.

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